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SUBJECT: COMOROS DISASTER DECLARATION - WIDESPREAD FLOODING FROM
EXCESSIVE RAINFALL

11. This is an Action Cable. See para 2 and 5 for action required.

SUMMARY:

12. Unseasonably heavy and sustained rains in the Comoros from late March to mid-April caused extensive damage to buildings, infrastructure, and crops. The Government of the Union of the Comoros has declared an official disaster in 41 villages across all three islands - the total affected population is estimated over 100,000 people. Based on the wide-spread extent of the damage to the Union of the Comoros and the government's declaration of disaster including a request for international assistance, it is in the interest of the US government to assist the Union of Comoros with humanitarian assistance. As such, this cable is a Disaster Declaration and post request USAID/OFDA to provide USD 50,000 for immediate disaster assistance. Post will provide these funds to UNDP/Comoros, who is coordinating all international assistance and will indicate that water, sanitation and hygiene should be a priority for the use of these funds.

END SUMMARY

SITUATION:

13. Unseasonably heavy rainfall occurred throughout the Comoros archipelago from late March to mid-April, resulting in severe localized flooding throughout the country. Initial assessments found over 500 families had been displaced from their homes, most of which are now staying with host families. Immediate needs include food aid and hygiene for displaced families and safe drinking water in many communities where cisterns were polluted. At least 15 bridges and many roads have been washed out or damaged, cutting off dozens remote communities.

14. The GOC has estimated the cost to provide emergency basic needs response to affected populations at USD 1.18 million to help displaced families relocate and to provide them cooking kits and food. To avert possible public health crises from unsafe drinking water, like cholera, the GOC also plans an emergency health and sanitation intervention at a cost of USD 247,000 to clean/refill cisterns, fund supplies for basic sanitation and clean-up, and hygiene/washing-up kits. In the longer term, the GOC with help from

donors will seek to repair and replace destroyed infrastructure and homes at a cost of up to USD three million.

¶5. The GOC Civil Protection Unit and Planning Commissioner have jointly taken the lead on assessment and emergency response; UNDP is coordinating international interventions in response to flooding damage. The Comoran Red Crescent and French Red Cross are also participating in relief efforts. The Chinese, South Africans, and UNICEF have already pledged to assist Comorans to respond to flood damage.

ACTION REQUIRED:

¶6. The Chief of Mission has determined that the disaster in the Comoros is of sufficient magnitude to warrant U.S. Government assistance and is therefore exercising the disaster assistance authority of USD 50,000 for emergency response. Post will provide this funding to UNDP, acting as coordinator of all international assistance, and will prioritize water and sanitation activities to be undertaken. Post will monitor the situation and depending on the extent of additional donor and GOC contributions and any remaining gaps, post will coordinate with USAID/OFDA's regional office in Pretoria, South Africa, to determine whether and in what form any additional assistance may be required.

MARQUARDT